

DRAFT LETTER TO JAMES ARBUTHNOT

Thank you for your letter of 1 May about the Initial Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme (the Scheme).

I share your anxieties around the progress of the Scheme, and appreciate the concerns this will create for other interested MPs until we are able to update them on the emerging conclusions. We remain determined to investigate the cases as quickly as possible, which is why we have committed substantial resources to the Scheme, including paying professional advisers to help the applicants, appointing a team of 22 investigators alongside our dedicated programme team, and paying Second Sight to investigate each case. To date we have received 77 detailed applications, and have completed our investigations in 22 of these cases with the others currently underway.

However, the timescales associated with the Second Sight case reports means that the Scheme is still progressing more slowly than either you or I would wish. Their first case review is due to be submitted in draft in the coming days - a significant milestone, but it also highlights the substantial volume of work still to be completed. As far as I am aware, Second Sight's interim report on thematic issues, originally intended for March, is also not yet completed.

I am actively engaged in trying to resolve the issues around the progress of the Scheme and would welcome the opportunity to update you in person on my thinking. My office will be in touch with yours to find a suitable date. I would suggest you hold off circulating any correspondence until this point, as I feel we would be better able to decide how best to keep MPs updated after we have spoken.

There is one other issue which I would like to take this opportunity to address. I am aware that you have received a copy of some correspondence between Alan Bates and Jenny Willott MP. It is worth noting that the Working Group Chair has felt that he should write to the Minister correcting some inaccuracies in Mr Bates' letter. I too have written to the Minister outlining my own concerns with the letter, which risks undermining the proper operation of the Working Group (and, in turn, the Scheme itself). In particular:

1. Contrary to the Working Group's Terms of Reference, the content of the letter discloses outside the Working Group information which is confidential to the members of the Working Group.
2. It contains several factual inaccuracies and paints a picture which is inconsistent with both the current and historic position. For example Post Office had produced 20 reports for the Working Group's consideration at the date Mr Bates wrote, rather than none, as he suggests in his letter.

3. The fact that Mr Bates has bypassed the structure of the Working Group to raise concerns is particularly disappointing and contrary to the spirit of the Working Group.

This clearly remains a complex and challenging programme, and we need to focus on how best to resolve the cases in as swift and orderly fashion as possible. I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss this further.